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ABSTRACT

In 1974 the course "Outdoor Education" began at the University of New Brunswick for student teachers in training. Since its inception 125 students have laboured, learned and enjoyed the course whose 3 primary goals are to help student teachers (1) choose aspects of the environment to enlarge the scope of a subject, (2) focus attention on the need for preparation of trips, and (3) focus attention on the physical characteristics of a group and the safety aspects involved. The program is carried out in four weekend trips (Friday afternoon to Sunday afternoon) to St. Andrews in southwestern New Brunswick where studies on tidal salt water and settlement can be conducted, Baxter State Park in Maine provides study of Alpine geography and a look at vertical climate change brought about by altitude, Mactaquac Provincial Park is ideal to learn canoe skills and tenting expertise, and Kingston on Kennebecasis Peninsula allows study of winter woods. A limited enrollment of 20-25 students is imposed along with certain student requirements, such as capability of swimming 300 yards in clothing and walking 15 miles a day. Grades are awarded on all studies conducted during the trips, as well as participation and physical skills acquired during the course. (ERB)

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OUTDOOR EDUCATION

A Unique Experience for Student Teachers at U.N.B.'s Faculty of Education

1980

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The school has, for a long time, been regarded as the temple of learning, and the teacher as the high priest who dispensed knowledge to the assembled children. However, new trends throughout the 60's and 70's have worked to undermine this idea of the school and teacher and at the same time has created many changes in our society.

The teacher's role in this changed society is much like a gardener, to provide the environment in which his charges will grow and mature. Greater flexibility has come into the schools, and with it a greater degree of mobility for teachers and classes to broaden the environment in which they study.

The effect of all this has proved unsettling to many teachers. They are afraid to take students out into the larger world beyond the classroom because they feel insecure. They do not know the answers to all the questions students ask when they discover new and exciting things outdoors.

This is a poor excuse, however, for not taking students beyond the school building. It is the same as saying, "I can't take my class to the library because I am not familiar with the contents of all the books". There will never be an individual who has a good grasp of Botany, Zoology, Entomology, Geology,

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Archeology, Astronomy, Meteorology, Sociology, Ecology and all the other fields of study which will come to bear on a group of children, outdoors.

Teachers must be given experiences that will enable them to "throw-off" the shackles of insecurity. We must instill them with confidence and some degree of expertise in using the outdoor classroom. Where to start? Should the start be made with teachers in the field or with student teachers in training?

Six years ago (1974), two environmental scientists, a geographer, a social studies expert and a physical educator in the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, N.B., decided the best place to start was with student teachers in training. The team put together a term course which, for want of a better title, was called Outdoor Education. The course has proved popular. It has retained the interest of one hundred and twenty-five student teachers who have laboured, learned and enjoyed. Graduates have come back to help. Many of those who have passed into the ranks of the nation's teachers have apparently retained its philosophy and developed courses of their own in their schools.

From the outset it was accepted by the Planning Committee (team) that providing relevant teaching situations and materials, satisfying environmental conservation needs and learning to stay in the open air for extended periods of time required planning and practice. There were no hang-ups from

any team member in taking the classroom outdoors or bringing the outdoors indoors. Each had done this kind of thing before, successfully. The new circumstance was that there now were five Education Faculty members who wanted to work together and who, six years later, are still working together.

The primary aims of the course are to help the student-teachers:

1. To choose aspects of the environment which could be used to enlarge the scope of a subject area or provide focus for enlargement later; the outdoor experience being limited to part-day, day, or weekend trips.

2. To focus attention on the need for preparation for the trip; What are we going to do? What information have we already? Why are we going? What information do we need? What do we look for? What form of evaluation for student-teachers? Organization: How do we travel? What arrangements with other people? What materials (equipment) do we need for all? For individuals? Post-trip activities? Where to go from here? Did the projects do their job? What alterations? What emphasis? What form of evaluation for school students?

3. To focus attention on the physical characteristics of a group and the safety aspects involved: What forms of locomotion? Hiking? Canoeing? Showshoeing? What forms of shelters? Tents? Canoe-bivouac? Appalachian lean-to? The emphasis is to make sure that the student-teacher is aware of the physical demands, has the opportunity to gain skills in this area, and learns to relate them to children.

The program takes the form of four weekend trips: Friday afternoon to Sunday afternoon. Each trip is augmented by two hours or more of work in preparing the student-teachers for the studies and activities they will undertake. The trip is followed by round-up sessions which deal with the place of the studies and their expansion in main school programming and, when necessary, further work on physical skills related to the trip.

The sites of the four trips were chosen for their relative ease of access, relative isolation of the groups, as well as for diversity of environment. The site of the first trip is St. Andrews in Southwestern New Brunswick. Its Huntsman Marine Laboratory, early European settlements, beautiful and rocky, island infested shores, provides an environment for tidal salt water studies and settlement studies. Evening sessions deal with map and compass work and sessions on "Planning Out Trips" and "Group Dynamics".

The site of the second trip is Baxter State Park in Maine, U.S.A.. It offers upland hiking, backpacking, tenting and opportunities to study Alpine geography as well as look at vertical climate changes brought about by altitude and their effect on flora and fauna. Baxter Park is the end--or the beginning of the Appalachian Trail. A place for meeting unusual people.

Mactaquac Provincial Park, the site of the third trip, with its sail-boat mooring cove provides an ideal place in long September days for learning canoe skills, tenting expertise

and outdoor cooking. The 13 km canoe trip up to King's Landing and subsequent full-day's study of the historic settlement, its houses, their occupants and their unique goods, lands and chattels, provide a comprehensive insight into part of Canada's past. The group arrives and leaves by the natural high road of earlier times--by water.

The fourth and final trip, called the winter weekend, places the group into what has been, and one suspects still is, a closely knit community--Kingston, a loyalist settlement from the late 18th Century, astride the Kennebecasis Peninsula, surrounded by the bays and river of Saint John. It still retains many of the original families who are very proud of their heritage. We make our stay in Kingston Consolidated School (A MacDonald Foundation). Our main studies here are the winter woods, snow and cemetery studies using skis and snowshoes for movement over the undulating terrain. Local historians of settlement and river enrich our evening hours. The Old Kingston's Inn's busiest time was winter, of course, when the frozen river directed its traffic, both commercial and passenger across the low peninsula en route for Fredericton and the north. We travel this route on skis and can visualize the importance of the route for Indian and European traders in all seasons. Naturalist photographers in the region abound, attracted there by the influence and person of Freeman Patterson. When the wind howls around the old school in the early evening hours, we look with an expert naturalist's eye at the products of the skill of the photographer

and the earth's natural beauty through the seasons.

We do impose certain limitations on students. They must convince us that they are capable of swimming 300 yards in clothing and of walking 15 miles in one day. They must be the owners of suitable waterproof clothing, warm clothing, suitable walking boots or shoes, a backpack, rucsac and bedroll. We limit our student enrollment to 20-25 only because the cost of transport increases dramatically above that number and we wish to keep a safe ratio of student to instructor; no more than 1.8.

Grades are awarded for all the studies we do and a portion of the total goes for "Participation and Physical Skills". We have not yet found an objective way of allocating a grade for this area but we meet as an instructor's group to evaluate as best we may. These are the characteristics we look for: Participation is based on the student's ability to be involved with the group as a whole as well as with working partners. How does the student fit in, accommodate to use, appreciate and enjoy the environment provided by people and natural surroundings? Can the student work in the outdoors? Skills differ depending on the location.

Criteria for awarding grades under "Participation":

1. Ability to work with group.
2. Ability to work effectively as an individual.
3. A fitness component; ability to pace the overall effort.
4. Efficient use of physical skills presented.

5. Known response to suggestions from instructors.

6. Nature of effort under apparent adverse conditions.
For example: a) efficient, conscientious work in inclement weather,
b) successful conclusion to project, under apparent duress.

7. Stated ability (by student) in relation to actual ability and willingness to learn.

8. Effect of choice of personal equipment (e.g., clothing) on full participation.

9. Attendance at each pre-weekend briefing.

10. Ability to accept and use instructive criticism from fellow participants and instructors.

Instructors get to know people. We all get to know one another better because we are prevailed upon to do so by the nature of the course.

Spin-offs are enormous. We choose relatively isolated areas so that the group is turned in on itself. Students in university often go through four years of classes without knowing even the names of their classmates. A lot of the work is done in pairs; partners are changed for each project. Instructors play "bad guys-good guys" for disciplinary purposes. Student-teachers who do not accept good advice are required to explain (answer for) their indifference. Student-teachers who ignore advice regarding safety standards are given short shrift and providing there is no danger, allowed to "enjoy" the results of poor choices. Students who have special

knowledge or skills are encouraged to take leadership roles.

It has been said that the course continues because the instructors like it so much. Certainly, as the years have gone by we have brought more local experts into our instructing team and built steady friendships. Local historians, naturalists, photographers, canoe-builders, park supervisors, trail makers, marine biologists, teachers and students, housewives (local recipes), antiquarians, fishermen, pilots and port captains.

Come to us all ye who are heavy laden!--and we will find a spot for you and give you more work to do--but relevant work.